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NEWS RELEASE

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Elephant in the Room
by Senator Larry Craig

Actions have consequences. Whether you're talking about nuclear physics or parenting, this simple statement holds true. When I was growing up, my dad and his fellow ranchers believed it was usually a good idea to consider the consequences of doing something, before actually doing it. You might think the folks in Congress could agree, but sometimes they like to just hatch an idea and then leave it at that.

So goes the debate on Iraq policy the last few days. There is an elephant in the Capitol these days – the knowledge that however you bring the troops home, life continues in Iraq. But no one is talking about what happens to this region of the world after the United States' armed forces leave.

This isn't for lack of knowledge of the region or the situation. Intelligence briefings are available on a regular basis for Senators and House members on Capitol Hill. Still, for reasons I can only guess, Iraq-after-withdrawal is skipped over without adequate discussion of its implications by those relentlessly pushing a cut-and-run policy.

Make no mistake – to leave Iraq before the government is stable and their troops are trained will practically guarantee failure. It would lead to death and misery on a scale rarely seen, spilling over Iraq's borders and into the greater Middle East.

Don't just take my word for it though. As I write, Turkey is amassing troops on its southern border, in case they should need to deal with the Kurdish population that currently resides in northern Iraq. Syria and Iran continue to work together to destabilize the governments of Iraq and Lebanon through terrorist groups like Hamas and Hezbollah. If Iraq should collapse, Turkey, Syria, Jordan, Iran, Kuwait and Saudi Arabia could all be drawn into a struggle in the resulting power vacuum.

Iran would most likely be the heavyweight in the region, intimidating and threatening neighbors like Kuwait and Saudi Arabia. I'm not the only one troubled by a member of the Axis of Evil playing games with the world economy by exerting dominance over a region that contains 54 percent of the world's oil supply.

I want to be clear that I share Americans' frustration with the excruciatingly slow pace of reform and training of troops in Iraq. I wish this war had successfully drawn to a close long ago. But good politics doesn't always make good policy. While we would all like to bring our troops home as soon as

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possible, doing so right now or too soon would cause serious and real problems, not only for the Middle East, but for our national security here at home.

The “surge,” which we’ve heard so much about for the last few months, is just barely under way. It wasn’t until mid-June that all the forces needed to carry out the surge were actually in place and functioning. How in the world can we stand here then, and suggest that General Petraeus failed and the surge didn’t work?

Congress has already said we would wait to judge the surge by General Petraeus’ report and results in September, at which point we may reevaluate our positions on U.S. involvement in Iraq. We should have patience and honor that commitment. In the meantime, we should allow the military leaders, not the 535 would-be generals in Congress, to decide how best to fight the war.

Actions do have consequences. If we stay patient, we still have a chance to turn the corner in Iraq. That’s an outcome we’d all be happy to talk about.